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SUBJECT: REACTION TO PINOCHET'S DEATH MUTED BUT DETRACTORS
AND SUPPORTERS TAKE TO THE STREETS

REF: SANTIAGO 2490

Classified By: Ambassador Craig Kelly for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (U) Summary: Former Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet died December 10 at the Military Hospital in Santiago. The 91 year old Pinochet had been admitted after suffering a heart attack a week earlier (ref A). Both Pinochet supporters and detractors took to the streets to demonstrate their respective sadness and jubilation. Anti-Pinochet celebrations degenerated into violent confrontations with police, resulting in 99 arrests, six injured civilians and 43 injured police officers. The GOC announced it would not accord Pinochet state honors as a former president, nor would it declare national mourning. Pinochet will be accorded military honors as former Commander in Chief of the Army and then buried in a private ceremony on December 12. The GOC has not invited embassy military attaches. The Right has issued statements generally supporting Pinochet's legacy of economic reform and stability, while the Left has expressed disappointment that Pinochet was never convicted for his regime's human rights abuses. End Summary.

A RAPID REVERSAL

12. (U) According to hospital press releases, Pinochet had been recovering satisfactorily from a heart attack and emergency surgery on December 3. His doctors had expected to discharge him to home care, probably during the week of December 10. However, at mid-day December 10 his condition took a turn, and Pinochet was rushed to the intensive care unit unconscious. After 45 minutes of attempts to revive Pinochet, his medical team decided that further "heroic" efforts would be fruitless. Pinochet was declared dead at 11415. Pinochet's wife, Lucia Hiriart Pinochet, and four of his five children were present when he died, as the family had planned to celebrate her 84th birthday together. At 1500 the Military Hospital issued a formal announcement confirming Pinochet's death from coronary failure.

PUGNACIOUS MOURNERS

13. (U) As word of Pinochet's death spread, a small group of Pinochet supporters (mostly women) holding vigil in front of the Military Hospital began to swell, reaching several hundred people by late afternoon. Additional police arrived to exercise crowd control. After repulsing several attempts by Pinochet supporters to lower the Chilean flag in front of the hospital to half mast, the police commander at the scene ordered the flag lowered, saying "If I don't they (the mob) will lynch me." Pinochet supporters also attacked television reporters and bystanders at the scene, causing the police to

intervene and resulting in at least four arrests. Police constructed lines of barricades to protect the hospital and to separate Pinochet supporters from detractors also on the scene. A small group of Pinochet supporters formed in front of President Bachelet's residence, where she holds a weekly meeting with her ministers in the afternoon, chanting "We will never forget the liberator Augusto Pinochet," and "Fat lady decide," demanding the GOC grant a state funeral to Pinochet. That crowd dispersed peacefully after the GOC announced that Pinochet would not be accorded a state funeral.

¶4. (U) In the late afternoon December 10, after the Chilean Army announced Pinochet's wake and funeral would take place at the Bernardo O'Higgins Military Academy supporters gathered there as well, blocking the surrounding streets. Pinochet's body arrived at the academy early December 11, and at 0930 the gates at the military academy were opened to mourners. Estimates at noon were that roughly 5,000 people were waiting to pay their last respects to Pinochet at an open casket viewing.

CELEBRATION TURNS UGLY

¶5. (SBU) Also the afternoon of December 10, a small group gathered to celebrate Pinochet's demise with champagne in Santiago's Plaza Italia. The crowd rapidly swelled to thousands of people, celebrating peacefully but blocking traffic on one of Santiago's main thoroughfares. Pinochet detractors began to fill the Plaza of the Citizen in front of La Moneda (Chile's White House), reaching a thousand by late afternoon. Hooligans began to infiltrate both crowds and the police decided to intervene and restore traffic flow. The situation degraded into a running street battle with protesters burning barricades of tires in two major intersections near La Moneda and riot police employing water cannons and tear gas. Pinochet detractors grouped in several other areas of the capital, burning tires and interrupting traffic during the late afternoon and evening hours. Street celebrations and sporadic violence continued into the early hours of December 11, including in several other major cities. Despite clashes between protestors and police, the count as of 0900 December 11 was 99 arrests, six injured civilians and 43 injured police officers. The DCM, who arrived near the area in the early evening for a social event, reported that by that time the area was relatively quiet.

THE GOC (FINALLY) CLARIFIES ITS STANCE

¶6. (C) Although the GOC had apparently already decided Pinochet would not be accorded state honors as a former president (ref A), it delayed a formal announcement until 1845 December 10. GOC spokesman Ricardo Lagos Weber issued a statement saying Pinochet would be accorded honors befitting a former Commander in Chief of the Army, under military regulations. Pinochet's wake and funeral would be held at an improvised chapel (capella ardiente) at Bernardo O'Higgins Military Academy. Military installations would be authorized to fly the flag at half mast. The GOC respected the family's grief and would act within the institutional framework in regard to Pinochet's funeral. Adding to the official statement, Lagos said Bachelet would not declare a period of national mourning for Pinochet, nor would she take part in his funeral arrangements or ceremony. Defense Minister Blanlot would attend Pinochet's funeral in a gesture of solidarity with the armed forces. (Note: The Embassy will not/not send a representative; the GOC has not invited military attaches and the GOC has made clear it does not expect their attendance. Few, if any, are going.)

THE RIGHT DEMANDS RESPECT

¶9. (U) Predictably, Pinochet's supporters and former collaborators lamented that Pinochet would not be accorded a state funeral. The Independent Democratic Union Party (UDI)

issued a public statement highlighting the achievements of the military government. UDI President Hernan Larraín noted that Pinochet modernized the economy and successfully avoided going to war with Argentina, while other leading figures in his party expressed hope Pinochet's death would allow a more honest and positive historical balance of his regime. UDI's coalition partner, the National Renovation Party (RN), did not issue a formal statement on Pinochet's death. However, leading RN figures also noted that Pinochet was instrumental in reconstructing a country torn apart by Allende's socialist experiment. RN President Carlos Larraín (no relation to Hernan) stated that refusal to recognize that Pinochet led Chile for almost two decades reflected a "terrible myopia" and that the GOC was still stuck in the past. While recognizing the Pinochet regime had "committed grave mistakes" related to human rights, Senator Sergio Romero (RN) said it was hard to imagine Allende's Unidad Popular government building today's Chile.

¶10. (U) Pinochet's former collaborators also came to his defense. Former Commander in Chief of the Chilean Navy and current UDI senator Jorge Arancibia said the GOC was committing an "unpardonable error" in denying Pinochet a state funeral, while former Commander in Chief of the Chilean National Police Rodolfo Stange said "no-one can deny his record as a statesman." Former Senator and Pinochet Interior Minister Sergio Fernández called Pinochet the most important Chilean figure in the 20th century and said history would accord him his due, including credit for the transition to democracy.

THE LEFT BREATHES A SIGH OF RELIEF

¶11. (U) The reaction within the Concertación ruling party was more diverse. The Socialist Party (PS) issued a statement calling Pinochet's rule "one of the darkest chapters in Chile's history," and stating that Pinochet should not be accorded honors as former President or Commander of the army. Allende's daughter Isabel, a Socialist congressperson said Pinochet's death should not signal the end of investigations or trials for Pinochet regime abuses. Antonio Leal of the Party for Democracy (PPD) said Pinochet's death closed a chapter, and (his legacy) should no longer divide Chileans.

¶12. (U) Christian Democrat Party (PDC) Senator Andrés

Zaldívar expressed condolences to Pinochet's family and said God would judge him, while former Senator and eminence grise Edgardo Boeninger (PDC) said that one should not speak in death of one of whom you had a bad impression in life. Senator Jorge Pizarro (PDC) said "may God pardon him," but emphasized that Pinochet had become politically irrelevant.

AN OPEN CHAPTER

¶13. (C) Comment: As eloquently shown by the thousands of Pinochet detractors that took to the street December 10, and the thousands of supporters who lined up to pay their respects to the fallen dictator on December 11, Pinochet continues to have the power to stir strong emotions. With his death the Chilean left loses one of its iconic targets on its incremental quest to find justice for Pinochet's human rights abuses. However, Pinochet's passing is not likely to allow Chile to close this chapter once and for all. On the right, as two moderate, influential, business leaders told E/POL counselor last week, there are conflictive views. On the one hand, they deplored Pinochet's regime's human rights abuses. On the other, as one said, without the strongman's economic reforms, "We're Nicaragua." The coming to terms with that legacy will be the task of Chileans now and into the foreseeable future. As Pinochet supporter and UDI senator Ivan Moriera said, "This will not end until we are all in the ground."